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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: KENYA'S YOUTH BULGE: A TICKING TIME BOMB

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1. (U) Summary: Other valid explanations aside, one of the key under-appreciated drivers of the unrest and violence that gripped Kenya in early 2008 was the country's "youth bulge," a potentially destabilizing demographic phenomenon that in Kenya has generated a large pool of disaffected young men, angry over their exclusion from the political and economic mainstream. Channeling the power of this youth bulge into productive vs. destructive ends will require an investment and reform effort so massive and cross-cutting that it looks a lot like the one envisioned in Vision 2030, Kenya's extremely ambitious long-term development plan. It is a daunting task for the new coalition government. The economy has already lost ground this year, and there are reasonable estimates that given current trends, Kenya will need to produce 8-10 million new jobs for young people between now and 2012. In the absence of focused leadership to address the problems caused or exacerbated by the youth bulge, Kenya could be in for a protracted period of instability and even violence in the years ahead. End summary.

Background: Arm-Chair Analysts

2. (SBU) During and after Kenya's two month descent into near-civil war in January and February, much has been written and said about the causes of the violence and on what Kenya must do to prevent a similar scenario in the future. In addition to analyzing the spark provided by the disputed election results themselves, politicians, journalists and arm-chair analysts have been thorough in analyzing the underlying causes: Seething ethnic tensions based on real or perceived unfairness over how resources - especially land - have been allocated in Kenya over the decades.

Too Many Young Men of "Fighting Age"

3. (U) Fewer observers and policymakers, however, have addressed the demographic tinder that fueled the explosion of violence in early 2008: the surfeit of young, angry Kenyan men. Indeed, Kenya continues to experience a "youth bulge", a demographic phenomenon that can destabilize a society. With falling mortality among children during the past three decades, the pool of sons ready to inherit farms and jobs from their fathers has grown. The 1999 Census of Kenya showed that for every man aged 50-54 there were almost four men aged 20-24, and the situation has gotten worse since then. The German sociologist Gunnar Heinsohn, who coined the phrase

in the 1990s, recently wrote in the International Herald Tribune (January 17, 2008) that "Kenya provides a textbook example of domestic violence that is driven by what I call a youth bulge."

¶4. (U) Heinsohn defines the youth bulge as "a period of rapid demographic growth in which 30 to 40 percent of all males are aged 15-29," a period in life he dubs the "fighting age." This large pool of unemployed, landless (and hence unmarriageable in many ethnic groups) males is prone to crime and violence, particularly in a context of widespread poverty and weak political institutions. In a context of inter-ethnic tensions, such young men are easily manipulated by promises of land and jobs that they can wrest from "outsiders." (Note: A demographic corollary to this grim scenario is the "demographic dividend," as best seen in some Asian countries. A vigorous family planning program can reduce the number of children under age 15, and hence the dependency ratio. Coupled with better education and other improvements in productivity, these males in the 15-29 cohort can both produce and save more, and thus help fuel economic development instead of violence. End Note).

The Numbers Don't Lie

¶5. (U) Writing in April in the Nation, Kenya's largest daily newspaper, Kinuthia Murugu, Kenya's Permanent Secretary for Youth Affairs, also rang the alarm bell: "Kenya is heading for a youth bulge of such magnitude that it has the capacity to seriously destabilize our social order as we know it today." Heinsohn and Murugu paint this disturbing picture in numbers, as well as words:

- In only 80 years, Kenya's population has jumped from 3 million to 37 million.
- Kenya is among the world's top 40 high-growth population countries.
- In 2007, Kenya's total fertility rate still stood at an average of five children per woman (in the U.S., it's two).
- Kenyan men have a median age of 18 (vs. 35 in the U.S.).
- 75% of Kenya's population is below 30 years of age.
- 42% is below the age of 15; of these, 7.5 million are male.
- Of the 11 million Kenyans aged 18-35, three million are unemployed.
- 45% of the unemployed in Kenya are below 24 years of age
- 90% of the unemployed youth do not have appropriate vocational or professional training.

¶6. (SBU) Kenya is in "demographic armament," according to Heinsohn, and as both he and Murugu note, Kenya's current generation of youth is far better educated and more aware of events and trends in the wider world than predecessor generations were. As a consequence, they are much more ambitious than their seniors, and thus much more likely to become disillusioned if their heightened economic expectations are not met, as they so often aren't in Kenya. This in turn explains the scale of violence in early 2008. In earlier electoral cycles, there was also heightened political and ethnic tensions, and often violence. But it was never to the degree experienced in 2008 due to the youth bulge.

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

¶7. (U) The youth bulge can work as a positive change agent if it takes place in the context of sound social investments and strong political and economic institutions. Hence Murugu's call for a "fundamental shift in our planning paradigm and resource allocation framework" in Kenya. Like others, he says one vital key is job creation.

¶8. (SBU) But on the employment front, the numbers are daunting. Murugu estimates that Kenya has three million unemployed youth today, and that this number will grow to 4.5 million by 2013. But he's probably low-balling his estimate. An analysis prepared by prominent Kikuyu businessman Kibby Kareithi and obtained by the Embassy attempts to quantify Kenya's "jobs deficit." It estimates that there are nearly 2.5 million Kenyans aged 25-34 currently looking for jobs, with another 8 million Kenyans aged 15-24 who will be in search of jobs over the next five years. If one accepts these

estimates, then Kenya will need to create a staggering 10 million new jobs by 2012 in order to stave off another round of violence and unrest at the time of the next national election. This, says Kareithi, is the 800 pound gorilla in Kenya's living room, and he's working to make policymakers aware of the issue and pressing for fresh policies and programs.

Faster Growth Not Matched by More Jobs

¶9. (SBU) The capacity of the economy to create even a fraction of 10 million new jobs over the next five years is in doubt, according to Murugu. He points out that in 2002, the year the National Rainbow Coalition of President Mwai Kibaki came to power promising 500,000 new jobs per year, the economy barely grew. It still managed to create 450,000 new jobs - not bad. But in 2006, when it was growing 10 times faster at 6%, it only created an additional 540,000 new jobs, of which only 50,000 were in the formal sector. In short, as Murugu points out, even the more rapid economic growth experienced in recent years in Kenya has not generated the needed job gains to help obviate the risks of the youth bulge.

The Vision 2030 Connection

¶10. (SBU) Indeed, successfully channeling the awesome force of Kenya's youth bulge in a productive vs. destructive direction over the coming years will require a massive national, cross-cutting development effort that touches on every element of Kenya's political, economic, and social reform agenda. Fortunately, that sweeping, cross cutting agenda for change already exists in broad terms in Vision 2030, the previous government's reform and investment roadmap to middle income prosperity by the year 2030 (reftel). Unfortunately, the economic impact of the political crisis and violence probably has set the vision back by a year or two. Moreover, it will be difficult for any Kenyan government to demonstrate the cohesiveness, focus, political will and institutional capacity to enact the sweeping and painful reforms required to make Vision 2030 a reality and generate the educational and job opportunities needed to stave off the potentially destabilizing impact of the youth bulge.

Other Ideas: National Service

¶11. (SBU) According to Kareithi, a successful businessman with a social conscience, there are other big-picture proposals circulating amongst policymakers designed to specifically address the impact and implications of the youth bulge. A seemingly simple one, in which USAID and other USG agencies are currently involved, is to strengthen access to free primary and secondary education in Kenya. At the same time, others propose re-writing Kenya's primary and secondary curricula, with help from the private sector and civil society. The goals: To improve the quality and content of education and vocational training to make it more relevant to private sector skill needs, and to foster a stronger sense of Kenyan national identity. Improving access to, and the quality of, education would not only keep more young people in school longer, but would also impart the skills needed to succeed after graduation.

¶12. (SBU) USAID is also improving productivity and market access for staple and high value agricultural products. Agriculture is a main driver of the Kenyan economy and a major source of employment for youth. Another USAID initiative is strengthening access to credit and training for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) since SMEs, many in the informal sector, are the biggest source of new jobs in Kenya.

The USG Role

¶13. (U) In addition to these efforts, the U.S. Mission has long been addressing youth issues as part of program portfolios, with campaigns targeted at youth in terms of HIV/AIDS, education, voting,

and the like. Post, however, appreciates the need to target alienated youth under our peace and security programs. The Mission will be using FY 2007 1207 funding to provide job skills training and outreach in Northeastern Province. Also, in realization that disaffected Rift Valley youth were easily co-opted into nefarious activities in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 elections, we have submitted an FY 2008 1210 proposal which will address youth issues in the epicenter of post-election violence. While such programs will not solve the problem, they are expected to provide some degree of encouragement and buy-time for the structural reforms and reconciliation processes to work.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) The destructive potential of Kenya's youth bulge is real - the violence that followed December's polls and the subsequent outbreak of Mungiki violence prove that. Thus, it would be wise for policymakers and pundits both in Kenya and elsewhere to avoid the temptation of believing that leadership politics in Nairobi are the only thing that matters in Kenya. In the run-up to the elections in 2012 (or maybe earlier), the fate of the country may hinge more on Kenya's large, restless, but largely powerless younger generation. Members of the youth bulge in Kenya will face daunting economic challenges in the coming few years even under the best scenarios. But if on top of this they perceive that the country's political elite is indifferent or worse towards their ambitions and aspirations, then Kenya is in for some rough times ahead.

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